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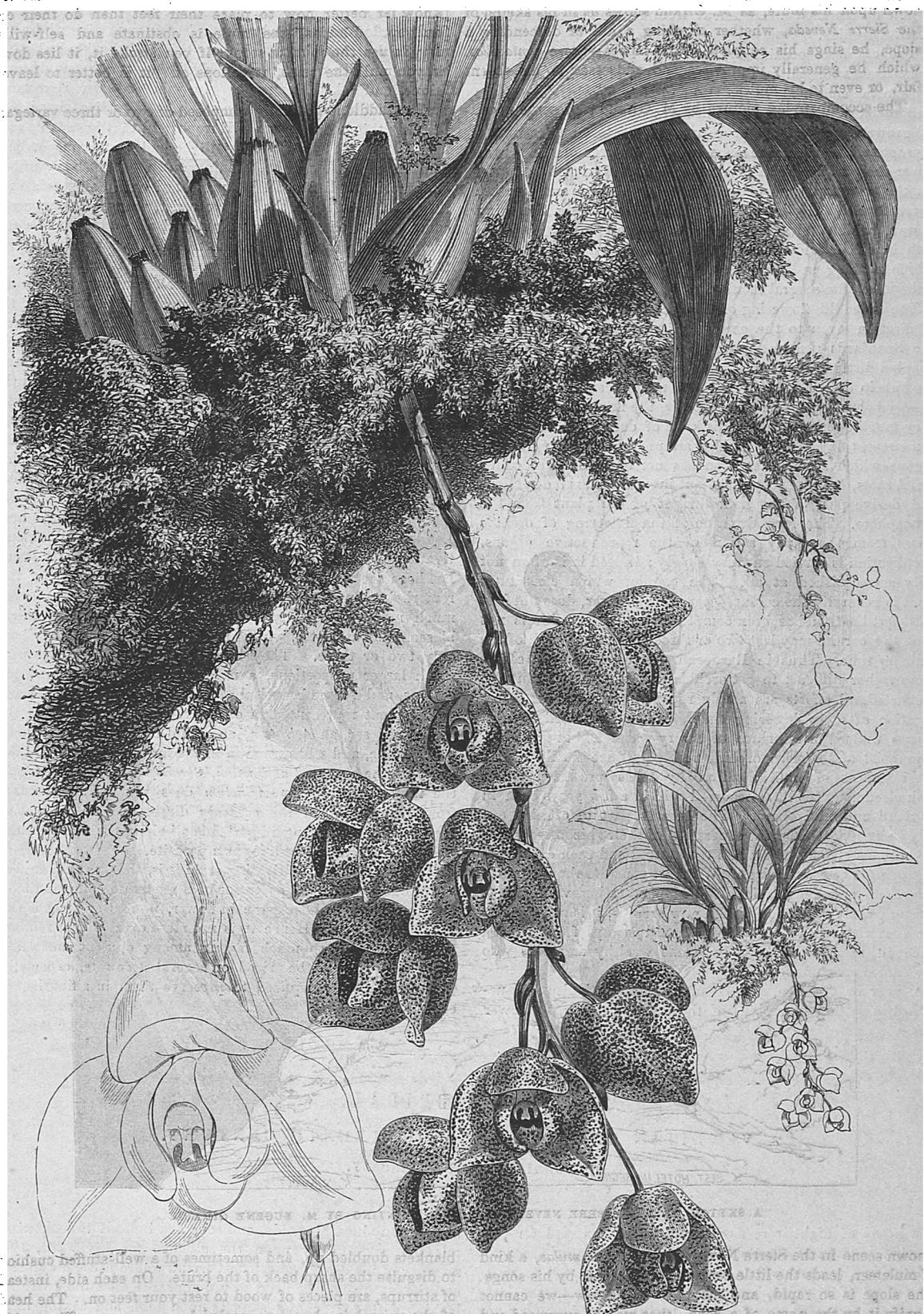
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ORCHIDS.



THE ACINETUM—A SPECIES OF THE ORCHID TRIBE.

THE orchid tribe are, if we may so say, the most eccentric of all the vegetable kingdom. Almost everything about these

plants deviates from the usual types and ordinary habits of vegetation. Some—and indeed the greater number—live as

parasites on the bark of large trees in the forests of inter-tropical regions. These are called epiphyte orchids; the others, which derive their nourishment from the soil, are called terrestrial orchids.

The epiphyte orchids are the most beautiful ornament of those arches formed by the gigantic trees of the hottest countries in the continents of the Old and New World. The shade and moist warmth are particularly favourable to their mode of growth. In all the cold and temperate climates of the European continent, the oaks and beech-trees of the forests cover their bark with mosses and lichens; in tropical climates, on the contrary, trees of every variety of form and size are covered with orchids, forming, immediately after the rainy season, which takes the place of winter, lovely garlands rich in colour and delicious in perfume. These charms, of which nothing in Europe can give any adequate idea, last unimpaired for several months.

The splendid flowering of the orchid tribe is an object of admiration even to the savage tribes of our land. When the Spaniards penetrated for the first time into the thinly-peopled districts of Central America, they were struck to see the huts in the villages covered with magnificent orchids, principally belonging to the genus *Laelia*, the flowers of which are very much elongated; and this kind of decoration subsists at the present day. Many orchids are provided with particular organs which are neither branches nor roots, but are called aerial roots, because they strike out into the air in all directions and derive part of the nourishment of the plant from the atmosphere. The long duration of the flowering of orchids arises from the tardy action of the reproductive organs. Fertilisation is carried on very slowly; indeed it is often not fully accomplished at all. The corolla, which constitutes what is generally the coloured part of the flower, does not fade until fertilisation has been completed, and when this is not done the corolla may last two or three times the length of the ordinary time. Thus in European green-houses it is sometimes rather difficult to get orchids to flower; but when this is effected, all efforts are amply repaid by the extraordinary duration of their flowering time. When cultivated in hot-houses under the influence of a very warm and at the same time moist atmosphere, orchids rarely produce fertile seeds; yet instances of multiplication by seeds produced under such circumstances have occurred within a few years both in England and in Ireland. The greater part of orchids can only be propagated by the separation of their rhizomes, which are bulbous stems rooting into the ground and each capable of producing a complete plant. When we consider the numerous difficulties and dangers involved in penetrating wild forests and unhealthy regions to obtain new orchids, it is not surprising that these beautiful plants should always fetch a high price in Europe. There are some wealthy amateurs who pay enormous sums for them.

A year or two ago, Mr. Henderson, a horticulturist, succeeded in getting an orchid, of the genus *Cattleya*, to flower

for the first time in Europe. A wealthy English duke went, according to custom, to inspect his conservatories, accompanied by a young lady of his family, who was passionately fond of flowers, and whose admiration was riveted by the new *Cattleya*, which surpassed anything of the kind she had ever seen. The duke, going to Mr. Henderson, pointed to the flower, and asked the price. In vain did Mr. Henderson protest that he did not wish to sell it at any price, that it was the only thing of the sort in Europe, and that he was unwilling to part with it to anybody till he had first propagated it. The imperturbable duke, holding out a pocket-book full of bank-notes, replied to all his protestations by simply asking the price. At length the horticulturist, weary of the contest, consented to accept a large sum and allow the duke's fair companion to carry off the plant. We do not feel at liberty to state the exact amount; suffice it to say, it was as much as it would take a clever workman several years to earn.

Though travellers had for many years spoken highly of the singular organisation, beauty, and fragrance of epiphyte orchids, it was not till thirty years ago that horticulturists in England knew how to cultivate and propagate them with success. One of the first to overcome the difficulties in the way was the late Mr. Cattley, from whom the plant just mentioned derived its name. British skill and perseverance soon met with their due reward, and orchids are now raised by cultivation to a degree of perfection altogether surpassing that which belongs to their natural condition. While before 1820 scarcely any English garden could produce twenty distinct species of this tribe, some of the nurserymen near London can now exhibit more than a thousand. What cultivation has done for roses, dahlias, tulips, and other flowers, has been accomplished with equal success in the case of this remarkable and beautiful tribe. They have been rendered much more productive, so as to contain twenty or thirty blossoms on a cluster, while in their natural state they bore only two or three. They have also been made to assume much larger proportions, a richer fragrance, more glowing colours, and a more beautiful aspect altogether.

The plant represented in our engraving (p. 69) is, as the reader will see, an *Acinetum*, an orchid only lately introduced into Europe, and still rare even in the finest collections. Like many of the genera *Dendrobium*, *Stanhopea*, and the *Aerids*, the flower-stalk of the *Acinetum* does not spring upwards from below, but in the contrary direction. In its native region its flowers hang in garlands all along the trunk of the tree on which the plant lives as a parasite.

One advantage of cultivating orchids is, that, as they flower at various seasons, the possessor of a moderate collection may expect always to have some in flower, no matter what is the time of the year. Hence it is not mere caprice that renders them objects of so much favour among opulent amateurs. They are worthy to be prized on several accounts, especially the care and skill required to preserve them in a flourishing condition.

THE DEAD BRIDAL.

A VENETIAN TALE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

BY JONATHAN FREKE SLINGSBY.

CHAPTER XX.

THE hours of night wore slowly and wearily onward for the principal inmates of the Palazzo Polani. The count paced to and fro in the great *salone*, for he was too agitated to seek the repose of his chamber. He had struggled to the last against the fate that seemed about to bear him down and to crush him; and now he looked up at the portraits of his ancestors that hung from the walls, and felt that the glory was about to depart from his house. True it was, there was still one mode left of averting ruin, but from this he shrank with the instinct of his aristocratic nature; and even when he had

at times subdued his pride, and schooled himself to look with tolerable tranquillity upon the alliance for his ward, the memory of his dearest and truest friend would cross his spirit, and the features of the dead would appear to his mind's vision, looking with reproachful sadness upon him, and asking him how he could betray a solemn trust, and outrage the feelings of the child committed to his care. Then, too, the horror with which Bianca heard the proposition came upon him, and wrung his heart with a pang of remorse and shame. And so his feelings alternated and swayed him to and fro, till at one